

Don't Worry, Be Ready

By Paul Bress

There are times when a teacher ought to put more effort into a lesson than s/he in fact does. I want to concentrate, however, here on those occasions during the lesson when the teacher expends too much energy, without actually helping students.

Personally, I tend to fret in parts of a lesson which are not teacher-centered. This is because I find it difficult to know when students have finished tasks set for individual/pair/group work. So, I have hovered and fretted, and I have worried particularly about early finishers being bored.

One way of solving this problem is by using "ready" signals. One way of doing this is for a representative of each pair or group to say "Ready, Paul!" when they have finished. However, this may disturb those still working and make them feel anxious or harassed.

Another possibility is to use building blocks, Duplo, or Cuisenaire rods. Each individual, pair, or group gets a red and a green brick. When they put the red on top of the green, this means they have not finished their task. When they put the green on top of the red, this means they have finished the task to the best of their ability. The individual or pair or group that has finished then waits for another individual, pair, or group to display the green brick, at which point the two individuals, pairs, or groups check whether they have completed the task in the same way. When the majority have displayed the green bricks, the teacher can ring a bell, signaling all to stop.

What are the advantages of this system? After students have used the system once, the teacher does not have to instruct them to regroup each time. Moreover, the fast finishing students are not left feeling awkward, and students who work more slowly will not feel quite so rushed or intimidated.

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